

The Arts II:
West African Dance

Teacher's Packet

A KET professional development workshop for educators approved for
Professional Development Training by the Kentucky Department of Education.

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The Arts II: West African Dance

Overview of the Seminar

Targeted Audience: Arts and humanities and physical education teachers, all levels

This seminar features Mali native and drummer Yaya Diallo and his wife, Harlina Churn-Diallo of Louisville, discussing and demonstrating the art of African dance. The seminar begins with the dance “Mouwa,” a dance used in farming. After an introduction to West African dance, they provide warm-ups, connections between music and movement, and a lesson in choreography.

About This Teacher Packet

This packet includes biographies of the Diallos, an agenda for the program, and specific materials related to seminar content. You’ll find more details in the table of contents on page 3.

Seminar Format

This 60-minute program was recorded on location in Louisville. Any materials or information needed for participation in the seminar is provided in the videotape and/or included in the teacher packet.

Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Star Channels Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. Districts or schools may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development. For example, if a teacher participates in one 90-minute program and spends an additional 30 minutes in related activities, he or she could be awarded a total of two hours professional development credit.

Individual teachers who wish to use these videotapes for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or with their district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

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Materials and Requirements Needed for Participation in the Seminar

- Pencil or pen
- Paper
- Teacher’s packet

About the Seminar Presenters

Harlina Churn-Diallo has an AB.S. degree in Pan African studies and cultural anthropology from the University of Louisville and a certificate from the Institute for the Study of African Culture, Senegal-Gambia, West Africa. Harlina is the founder and artistic director of the Imani Dance and Drum Company in Louisville. She has received a number of awards, including the Kentucky Arts Council-Al Smith Fellowship, the Kentucky Foundation for Women Award, the Governor's Award, and the Outstanding Achievements in the Arts Award. Harlina has served as an instructor for the Kentucky Institute for Arts in Education and has been assistant director, choreographer, and performer in many dance productions in Kentucky; Indiana; Washington, D.C.; South Carolina; Florida; Chicago; Canada; and Africa.

Yaya Diallo was born in Mali, West Africa. As a member of the Minianka (Bamana) people, Yaya was raised in a culture that works, worships, lives, and breathes to the beat of the drum. An instrument for transmitting traditional knowledge among the Minianka, the drum is the focal point of Yaya's life, and his link through the universal medium of music to the Western world.

Yaya attended primary school in Zangasso, Mali; secondary school at the Lycée Askia Mohammed in Bamako, Mali; and college at the Université de Montreal, where he majored in chemistry. His training in African music includes the conga, xylophone, and talking drum; he also is multi-lingual, with proficiency in French, English, Bambara, and Senufo.

Yaya has performed throughout the U.S., Canada, Asia, and Europe. He has recorded several CDs, cassettes, and phonodiscs, including "The Healing Drum: African Wisdom Teaching," has published a book with the same title, and has taught and developed music courses at the university level.

Seminar Agenda

The Dance Mouwa

Harlina Churn-Diallo and
Yaya Diallo, Presenters

Introduction to West African dance

Warm-ups

Music and movement connection

Choreographing the dance

Celebration of unity

West African Dance Statement

Dance, known as *hooro* in Minianka, like music, is not just an aesthetic expression. Taken by the sound of the music, the dancer enters into another level of reality, both communal and universal. In these circle dances, done in community celebrations, each individual has his or her rightful place. Not only the beautiful, the elegant, or the sophisticated belongs, but everyone. The dance possesses an invisible force that can draw a person farther than he or she imagines. A dancer who is truly taken by the music becomes capable of movements he or she could not have willingly done. Some people become so possessed by the dance that for several days afterwards they have a different sense of reality than the average person.

We dance under many circumstances. First, there are secular dances for everyone—dances for special occasions, dances at marriages, at births, or at the naming of a child. In celebrating together, we find a place for questions such as “What am I doing in this world?” or “Does life have a meaning?”. It is like community preventative therapy. Life feels good. It is no small thing to dance in community. It is a great harmonizing measure.

Next come the initiation dances performed expressly as rites of passage at various stages of a person’s life.

When the Minianka work, they move rhythmically. When they dance, their movements express the activities of daily life. Most popular, traditional dances in Africa are directly related to work, whether they repeat the movements of physical labor or honor different occupations. When people dance in the evening, their movements follow the gestures of the work they have been doing during the day. A fisherman does not dance in the same way as a hunter.

Often the work itself can be seen as a dance. When women wash clothes on the river bank, they make music by slapping the clothes against the calabashes. To pound grain into daily cereal, four women stand around a large mortar carved out of a portion of tree trunk. Their pestles rise and fall like pistons. The cadence is accentuated by throwing pestles up in the air, clapping hands, and catching the pestles. If one woman loses the beat, it will break the rhythm of others. In the blacksmith’s workshop, the boy with the bellows sets the first rhythm with a steady in-and-out motion on his accordion-like instrument. The smith hits the metal on the anvil in a second rhythm that makes a musical harmony with the sound of the bellows.

There are other reasons for dancing and playing music. For example, dances for the dead are performed during funerals and burials. The Bambara people of Mali perform a dance called *gomba* which takes seven years to learn and is taught in secret in the forest. Another dance called *dounouba* is for people who are threatening each other or are in an intense rivalry. In Minianka dancing, there is room for improvisation—what is called the dance of the personality. The Minianka say “When there is dancing, it is not only the living who are present.” The presence of spirits at dances is often signaled by the important phenomenon of trance.

In the village, our dancing shows whether we are in tune with our inner natures. Along with our music, our dancing helps keep us in tune with ourselves and in harmony with one another and the cosmos.

Becoming a Proficient African Dancer

Yaya Diallo

To become a proficient African dancer in my culture, you must follow seven basic requirements for drumming: listening, observation, practice, focus, feelings, role, and attitude.

- **Listening:** I start with simple elements of clapping and build upon these elements for more complex patterns.
- **Observation:** Students must observe the placement of my hands on the drum while I'm playing the three basic sounds.
- **Practice:** Participants are expected to repeat rhythms and patterns over and over again.
- **Focus:** One must be tuned into drumming while at class, and not be preoccupied with other issues.
- **Feelings:** One must internalize and become part of the music and not merely be a robot of the instructor.
- **Role:** Each participant is required to play and keep a particular pattern when polyrhythms are introduced in the class.
- **Attitude:** Participants must come to class with an open mind and willingness to accept the knowledge that is being given without judgment.

The following six elements are also necessary:

1. Dance steps must be synchronized with the music.
2. Each dancer must be able to perform each dance step in all directions (forward, back, left, and right).
3. All dancers must dance to their level and not be in competition with another dancer in the class.
4. Dancers then combine the dance steps to form one single African dance.
5. All dancers must perform the single African dance piece as a team.
6. It is imperative that you smile, make it look easy, and have fun!

Maps of Africa

The presenters strongly recommend that participants refer to a map of Africa when studying African dance and music. Political changes on the African continent over the past century have altered names (and, in some cases, boundaries) of many African nations.

Two good Internet sources for up-to-date maps of Africa are:

<http://www.africa-guide.com/afmap.htm>

This is basically a large outline map of the African continent with the various African nations drawn and labeled.

<http://www.library.nwu.edu/africana/map>

This is a more detailed map of the African continent, including names of cities and geographical features as well as countries.

The Dance “Mouwa”

This dance comes from the Bambara, Senufo, and Minianka people of West Africa. It’s a dance for the team of village farm workers who are responsible for weeding the fields.

The dance begins with the workers arriving with tools, forming a circle, and greeting one another. Then the workers form a horizontal line and begin to weed the field. Each person has a special song and rhythm that makes the work go faster. These songs and rhythms are played when a worker slows down or during rest time to motivate workers to get the work done.

A new rhythm is played for the worker who finishes first. This worker performs a solo dance. Then the workers line up again to go back down the field. This is repeated until the field is completely cleared of weeds.

Simple Dance Terms

High pitch: In drumming we call the high pitch “the slap.” In African dance, this corresponds to crisp, open movements of the arms, shoulders, and hips.

Middle pitch: Drum players call the middle pitch “tone.” In African dance, it corresponds to the movements of the feet.

Bass pitch: The deep bass notes give the impression of large physical size, bodily expansion, freedom, space, unity, and union. In African dance, we translate this sound by a movement that gives a hollow shape to the body.

Polyrhythm: More than two different patterns played at the same time.

Coordination: Two distinct movements using two different parts of the body at the same time.

Release: The freeing of the mind and tension.

Locomotor: Any movement done while traveling or moving with the feet (leaping).

Non-locomotor: Imagine the feet glued to the ground. Now go to town—twist, use your arms, stretch, etc.

Force: Power or energy, strength. A way in which you move through space. It can be done gently or aggressively or anything in between.

Space: An area around the body or far from it. The area in which you choose to create a dance.

Time: Meter, tempo, or duration of a musical note. For our purposes, it can be as simple as a step that goes “slow, slow, quick, quick, slow.” It can also refer to rhythmic movements.

Tempo: Fast or slow as in music and quickly or slowly in dance.

Levels: The highest level would be a jump or leap, a stretch with the arms to the ceiling, and/or a “rélevé” position (or standing on the balls of the feet). The middle level is basically flat-footed or with knees slightly bent, and the lowest level is a deep knee bend or use of the floor.

Pathways: Patterns of a dance or dance steps; curved, circular, straight in a line, zigzagged, backward, forward.

Choreographer: The person or persons who create the dance.

Dancers: Those who execute the dance or dance steps.

Resources

Books and Compact Disks

Benin

Yuruba Drums: Bata and Dundun Ensembles with 32-page booklet

Burkina Faso

Dances of Burkina Faso

Cameroon

Les Genies Noirs de Douala . . . Percussion and Dances

Gambia

Ancient Heart Mandinka/Fulani Music

Ghana

Ancient Ceremonies, Songs, and Dances

Guinea

Wassalo Mamdy Keita/Sewa Kan Djembe Ensemble

Ivory Coast

Adama Drame and Foliba Mandingo Drums, Volume 2

Mali

Songs of Percussion/Soungalo Coulibaly

Niger

Touareg Volume 5/Chayly

Nigeria

The Invocation: Babtunde Olatunji and Drums of Passion

Djabate Doudou N'Diaye Ros-Sabah drumming with over fifty percussionists and eight singers

Sierra Leone

Traditional Music—Various Artists

Togo

Togo—Traditional Music

Compilations

Jali Kunda: Griots of West Africa and Beyond/Traditional Music from Gambia, Senegal, Guinea
(Ellipsis Arts)

“Africa” Never Stand Still (Ellipsis Arts)

Books and Music from the Presenter

The Healing Drum (African Wisdom Teaching), Destiny Books

The Healing Drum (African Wisdom Teaching), tape/CD

Dombaa Folee (Minianka Medicine Music of Mali), tape/CD

Dounoukan (Voice of the Drum), tape/CD

Dance Resources Available from KET

Arts Toolkit: Dance

Visit <http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/dance/> for information and online resources related to the KET Dance Arts Toolkit. The Toolkit includes videos, video excerpts, and accompanying teaching and informational materials to help you address Kentucky academic standards as well as to build your own knowledge of dance.

Kentucky teachers may order the Dance Toolkit from KET. Visit our ordering information page at http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/dance_order.htm for complete details.

Instructional Television

You can learn about the programs listed below and other instructional series and programs available from KET by searching our online Instructional Videos Catalog at www.ket.org/itvvideos/.

Dancing Threads: Community Dances from Africa to Zuni

Designed for students in grades P-8, this series of four 30-minute programs features outstanding performers teaching traditional Appalachian, African-American, and American Indian dances and “play party games.”

DanceSense

This 10-part series of 15 minute programs, geared toward grades 5-10, explores why people dance, dance elements and styles, dance in multicultural and historical contexts, and dance as an art form.

Professional Development Programs

Information about these programs may be found at the KET Professional Development Web site:

The Arts: A Content Course for Teachers, Seminar 2: Dance

This 90-minute professional development program provides teachers with standards-based illustrations of the elements and principles of dance.

The Arts III: Afro-Cuban Dance

This 40-minute professional development workshop features dancer/choreographer Katherine Kramer introducing teachers to the forms and rhythms of Afro-Cuban dance.

Editor’s Note: KET often airs Kentucky and national dance productions on its evening schedule (KET1 and KET2). To learn about current programming, check in *Visions*, KET’s program guide (available at the back of *Kentucky Monthly* magazine) or go to “Watch” on the KET Web site, www.ket.org.

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